

South Dakota National Guard

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June 24, 2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Two countries, one mission at Golden Coyote

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CAMP GUERNSEY, Wyo. – It was five o'clock in the morning, just before sunrise when the low, staccato *chops* announced the approach of a helicopter over a quiet pasture near Camp Guernsey, Wyo.

It came in over a steep hill, twin rotors identifying it as a CH-47 Chinook – a workhorse helicopter used for transporting equipment, gear or troops, depending on the mission. It circled overhead, blasting the pasture with a wash of cold, dewy air, and landed softly in the overgrown grass.

Then its back hatch dropped, and the South Dakota National Guard's 211th Engineer Company (Sapper) and 591 Royal Engineers poured onto the field. Each Soldier carried a rucksack nearly as large as another person, loaded across their chests to make it easier to maneuver in the chopper's tight cargo bay.

They quickly established a defensive perimeter in the pasture, found their heading and moved out on foot before the Chinook was out of sight.

In minutes, the troops were gone. The sun hadn't even crested the horizon yet.

The whole scene was part of a training mission conducted at Camp Guernsey on June 15 as part of the 30th annual Golden Coyote training exercise.

Sappers from the 211th and 591 conducted the air assault mission in the pre-dawn hours to kick off a strenuous, 48-hour combat operations exercise that tested their endurance, stamina and skills as combat engineers.

Within hours of getting their boots on the ground, both units crossed through heavily vegetated terrain, cleared an abandoned outpost of enemy activity and established a base of operations from which they would conduct route clearance and assault exercises for the next two days.

The scope of the operation was rare for the 211th, and nearly unheard of for the 591. Combining forces at Golden Coyote allowed the two countries to work together in a real-world scenario, with equipment usually unavailable to them.

"Our company being from South Dakota, we don't have quite as many ranges as they have down here," said Capt. Michael Roselles, commander of the 211th. "Golden Coyote has provided us with a lot of assets we wouldn't have if we were just on our own training somewhere."

Among those assets were the Chinooks that transported the sappers to the field, as well as .50 caliber machine guns and heavy demolition equipment, Roselles said.

For the United Kingdom sappers, the exercise site was far larger than what they were used to.

“This area is much bigger than anything we have in the U.K.,” said Spr. Hannah Funnell, a combat engineer with the 591. “It’s an awesome opportunity. It’s just a big playground, really.”

But the exercise was no game. Sgt. 1st Class Michael Plooster, 3rd platoon sergeant with the 211th, said the terrain bore close resemblance to what his unit had seen while deployed, and created a true-to-life atmosphere for the exercise.

“There aren’t many places like Camp Guernsey,” Plooster said. “It has a lot of aspects of Afghanistan. A lot of the mountain ranges that they do have are very similar to when we deployed. It’s eerily the same as Afghanistan.”

Plooster added that working alongside the British helped round out the American’s training by bringing a new perspective to the table.

“It’s good to see the way that we can up our game a little bit by incorporating some of what they do, and vice versa,” he said. “It’s just nice to see some of our counterparts from a different country that we don’t get to work with every day, and see how they do things.”

The two units operated as one throughout the mission, sharing in the responsibilities of the mission and even carrying each other in casualty situations.

At the end of the exercise, when all enemy forces had been eradicated and the sappers were fueled more by adrenaline than sleep, they repacked their rucks and marched 12 miles back to their barracks at Camp Guernsey, clearly tired but no less enthusiastic.

“It’s been a fantastic opportunity for us to be involved in such a massive exercise like this,” said Lance Cpl. Wayne Allen, a combat engineer with the 591. “It’s something which a lot of us have never experienced before, possibly may never experience again, and it’s definitely one I’ll never forget.”

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High-resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



140615-Z-LN227-218: Soldiers with the South Dakota National Guard’s 211th



140615-Z-LN227-088: From left, 1st Lt. Kale Skogen, 1st Lt. Chris Olson and Spc. Matthew Nighbert, all with the South Dakota National’s Guard 211th Engineer Company (Sapper), plan their next move after being transported to a training ground at Camp Guernsey, Wyo., June 15, 2014. The 48-hour mission allowed the sappers to train a variety of skills necessary to their combat readiness during the 30th annual Golden Coyote training exercise. The exercise offered real-world training in scenarios similar to a deployed environment. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/RELEASED)



140615-Z-LN227-193: Sgt. 1st Class Austin Slaughter, a team leader with the South Dakota National Guard's 211th Engineer Company (Sapper), shoots an azimuth during an air assault training mission at Camp Guernsey, Wyo., June 15, 2014. The mission was part of a strenuous 48-hour exercise that tested the sappers' skills in combat and combat support during the 2014 Golden Coyote training exercise. Golden Coyote is South Dakota's premier training event, offering real-world combat scenarios to increase the military's combat readiness. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/RELEASED)



140615-Z-LN227-488: Sgt. Ramsay Chrissman, a combat engineer with the South Dakota National Guard's 211th Engineer Company (Sapper), prepares a detonation chord for breaching an enemy outpost's gate during a training exercise at Camp Guernsey, Wyo., June 15, 2014. The 48-hour mission combined the 211th with the United Kingdom's 591st Royal Engineers during the 2014 Golden Coyote training exercise. Golden Coyote brought together service members from 15 states and four foreign nations for two weeks of real-world training in the Black Hills region. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/RELEASED)



140503-Z-MH530-028: Spc. Justin Kehn, a combat engineer with the South Dakota National Guard's 211th Engineer Company (Sapper), clears a room at an enemy outpost during a training exercise at Camp Guernsey, Wyo., June 15, 2014. The sappers conducted a strenuous, 48-hour training mission to improve their combat readiness during the 2014 Golden Coyote training exercise. Service members from 15 states and four foreign nations attended this year's Golden Coyote in the Black Hills region. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/RELEASED)

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